

Striving to enter in at the strait Gate

explain'd and inculcated;

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AND THE

Connexion of Salvation therewith,

PROVED FROM THE

Holy Scriptures.

IN TWO

SERMONS

On *Luke XIII. 24.*

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Pastor of the West Church in BOSTON.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after
“righteousness; for they shall be filled.”

CHRIST'S Sermon on the Mount.

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SERMON I.

Striving to enter in at the strait Gate
explain'd and inculcated.

LUKE XIII. 24.

STRIVE to enter in at the strait gate.—

THESE are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, occasioned by a question that was proposed to him in the following terms:

“Lord, are there few that be saved?”

Who it was that asked this question, or what his views therein were, we are not particularly informed. However, it seems probable, by his addressing our Saviour under the title of “Lord,” that this was one of his professed disciples. But whoever he were, and whatever his particular views, this was certainly rather a question of curiosity,

6 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

curiosity, than of real importance to the inquirer. Our Lord therefore, instead of returning a direct answer to him, gave him, in common with others that were present, this admonition ; the observation of which could not but be of solid advantage to them, as tending to their own salvation respectively. "And he said unto them, Strive [Strive ye] "to enter," &c.

THE words, it is humbly conceived, may, without any impropriety, be considered as an exhortation, admonition or precept, given to all those in general, who hear the gospel of the kingdom preached ; the duty enjoined therein being common to all ; to high and low, rich and poor, male and female : And, it may be added, both to those who are, and who are not, already in a regenerate state : For, be they in that happy estate or not, still they ought to use their utmost diligence to obtain the salvation revealed in the gospel ; or, which is the same thing, to enter in at the strait gate.

BUT it may be proper to be a little more particular in explaining the phraseology of the text ; what is meant by the "strait gate," and what by "striving" to enter in thereat.

By the "strait gate," our Lord doubtless intends in general, the gate of eternal life and happiness. This is put beyond all doubt by his own words

words in his sermon on the mount; where he mentions the strait gate, and the narrow way, as that which "leadeth unto life," and which "few find;" in opposition to the wide gate, and the broad way, that "leadeth to destruction; and many there be," says he, "that go in thereat." Our Lord, in this manner of expression, seems to consider the happiness of the heavenly state, under the notion of a glorious mansion, or city; to which there lies one certain road, and the entrance into which, is by a door or gate. In conformity to which manner of conception, he says in the verse immediately following the text— "When once the master of the *house* is risen up, "and hath shut to the *door*, and ye begin to stand "without, and to knock at the *door*," &c. And, in the revelation of St. John, it is said, "Blessed "are they that do his commandments, that they "may have right to the tree of life, and may "*enter in thro' the gates* into the city." You see from hence, to what our Saviour alludes in the text, and why he uses this metaphor.

BUT why is this called a "strait" gate? Doubtless it is in respect of the many obstructions and difficulties which attend the working out our salvation, or finally gaining admission into the paradise of God. The way of error and vice is said to be wide, and the gate of destruction broad; because it is so natural and easy to walk in the one, and to enter in at the other. But the way of

8 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

of truth, righteousness and life, is walked in, and the gate of heaven entered, with difficulty: Whence it is, that they are described as narrow and strait, in opposition to the former.

By "striving" to enter in at the strait gate, is meant in general, exerting ourselves with vigour, or using our earnest endeavours to that end; to obtain the salvation of our souls, or finally to gain admission into the kingdom of heaven. This is the proper notion and idea of striving.* It is opposed to indifference, negligence and sloth; and implies an intense application of the mind and faculties, in order to effect what we have in view. And striving thus, supposes two things. One is, that there is difficulty in the way, or opposition to be overcome, which requires a vigorous effort. For if a thing may be performed with great ease, there is no occasion, nor indeed any room, for striving in order thereto. As, for example, a man in his full strength can, with no propriety of language, be said to strive to lift a straw, or a small pebble-stone; or to do any thing else, which may be done with facility. But this is far from being the case, with respect to the matter now before us. There are numerous and great difficulties in religion, as before observed; with reference to which, the gate of life is said to be strait: So that in this respect there is abundant occasion for striving.

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The world, the flesh and the devil; principalities and powers; and spiritual wickednesses in high places, are not to be overcome, but by great resolution and vigor on our own part, even tho' aided by Him, who is stronger than "the strong man armed."—The other thing supposed in striving, unless it be an irrational striving, is, that the object thereof is a matter of importance. For the difficulty of a thing, if it be of no consequence, is no proper reason for striving to accomplish it: So far from it, that this will be a good reason for not striving, or giving ourselves any trouble or concern about it. Men do indeed often take great pains, without having any thing in view, really worthy of them. In the language of the prophet, they "spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which satisfieth not." These are certainly ill-placed endeavours; striving to no good purpose, even tho' the ends aimed at are attained. But when our Lord admonishes us to strive, that we may enter in at the strait gate, this is a matter of infinite, eternal importance to us; and so justly demands our utmost care and endeavours.

SOME may perhaps think, that striving to enter in at the strait gate, farther implies some uncertainty as to the success of our endeavours; whether they shall be effectual or not: And that our Lord designed to suggest this to us, by such a manner of expression. But this is improbable

60 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

for several reasons; and particularly because, in his sermon on the mount, the precept is expressed absolutely: "Enter in at the strait gate:" Not as it is here, "Strive," &c. Which former manner of expression seems a much better argument for the certain possibility of the thing, than the latter is for the doubtfulness of it.

BUT enough has been said to explain the phraseology, and general scope of this precept. In farther discoursing upon the subject, it is proposed, by divine assistance, more particularly to represent to you, What this striving implies in it: The fatal consequences of not striving; together with the happiness and glory which will accrue to us, if we strive effectually, or so as finally to enter in at the strait gate: And lastly, What connexion there is, according to the word of God, between striving in the manner we may and ought to do, and actually obtaining what we aim at therein, the salvation of our souls. It is proposed to enlarge much more upon the last of these points, than upon any of the others. In the first place it will be proper,

I. MORE particularly and distinctly to represent to you, what this striving implies in it. For this is a very comprehensive duty, which presupposes some things, and directly contains several others. And,

1st. IT presupposes a man to be at least a speculative believer of the gospel, or of the christian revelation. For striving to enter in at the strait gate, is the same thing, in other words, with endeavouring to obtain that salvation which the gospel reveals. And it is evident, that no man can consistently be supposed to do this, unless he is first convinced of the truth of the gospel in general. So that whatever a mere heathen, one who has never heard of, or who rejects the christian revelation, as an imposture, may be supposed to do with a view to his future happiness; yet this does not come up to the proper notion and idea of striving to enter in at the strait gate. But more particularly,

2dly. THIS striving presupposes a man to be awakened into some sense of his sin, guilt, and misery; and into a serious concern for the welfare of his soul. The salvation revealed thro' Jesus Christ, respects, or has for its object, not the righteous, but sinners; not men, considered in a state of innocency, who would need no such salvation, but apostate, degenerate and guilty creatures, justly obnoxious to the wrath of God. It is in this view that mankind are considered in the gospel; the very foundation of which is laid in, and the whole superstructure built upon, the supposition that mankind in general are in such a state of sin, condemnation and ruin. And no one can be supposed to use his endeavours

12 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

to obtain deliverance from this state, or to have a part in that salvation which the gospel reveals, while he remains in a state of carnal security ; or has not an awakened sense of his misery, as lying under guilt, and being in a state of alienation from God. The doing any thing at all, how little soever it may be, with a view to obtain deliverance from sin and wrath, supposes a person to be convinced, that he is really a sinner, and, as such, liable to wrath.

3dly. *THIS* striving presupposes a person earnestly to desire the salvation revealed thro' Christ ; or to have his heart engaged in this matter, as a thing of the last importance to him. Desires always precede endeavours, or go before striving, both in our spiritual and temporal concerns. A man's striving, or using his endeavours, to obtain worldly riches, pleasures, power and preferment, supposes his heart to be set upon these things : For if it were not, he would not certainly be at any great pains to acquire them, or give himself much concern about them. This is strictly and evidently true of all our endeavours in religion, or striving to enter in at the strait gate. All exertions, efforts and strivings to this end, suppose that we sincerely desire to obtain salvation. Nor will any one strive as he ought to do, in order to this, unless his desires are strong and vigorous, in some proportion to the importance of it ; at least, unless he considers this as a thing of more consequence

consequence to him, than all worldly riches, pleasures and honors. For he that postpones the salvation of his soul to any thing in this world, can, with no propriety, be said to strive to enter in at the strait gate.

4thly. *THIS* striving implies in it, the use of proper care and diligence to be rightly informed concerning the way of salvation, and to guard against error in this respect. For surely, we cannot properly strive to enter in at the gate of life, or of the kingdom of heaven, if we are unsollicitous to find that "narrow way" that leadeth to it. And here there are two things to be particularly observed. One is, that there is really but one way of life and salvation revealed to us. The other is, that this is so narrow, that it may be fatally mistaken, or not found, by those that are careless and negligent in their inquiries after it. From whence arises the necessity of taking pains to this end: For if the way of truth and life were so plain and wide, that it could not possibly be misapprehended, all care and caution lest we should err from it, would be superseded.

THERE is, as was just now observed, really but one way of life and salvation, revealed in the gospel; and that is, the way which Jesus Christ himself taught; the new and living way, which was both opened and pointed out by him. With reference to which he says, "I am the way, the truth

14 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

truth and the life: No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." His inspired apostles also taught the way of life: Concerning whom it is said in the acts of the apostles, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." And that which they declared, was not a different way, but the same which Christ himself taught; as is manifest by comparing their doctrine with his. So that there is certainly a way, or one way of salvation, revealed. But is there any more than one? If any person says, there are two, or more, it is incumbent upon him to point them out; shewing the difference which there is betwixt them; and yet, that both are true and right, the ways of God's revealing. But this, it is presumed, no man will attempt to do. It is in reference to the unity of the way of life, that the apostle says, there is "one faith."—"There is one body and one spirit," saith he, "even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, *one faith*, one baptism, "one God and Father of all, who is above all," &c.* There is therefore as certainly but one true faith, or one gospel, in the faith of which we can be saved, as there is but one hope of our calling, but one Lord or Christ, but one God and Father of all. And we might as well suppose two Fathers of all, two Redeemers; and two gospels, as two ways of salvation, that differ essentially from each other: And the same apostle denounceth

* Eph. IV. 4. 5. 6.

nounceth a curse against whomsoever should preach another gospel, or another way of salvation, even tho' it were himself, or an angel from heaven.

It was farther observed above, that this one way of salvation may be fatally mistaken by those, who are careless and negligent in their inquiries after it. To which purpose it may suffice for the present, to remind you of two passages of scripture only. One is in the 2 Epist. of Peter, chap. iii. "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you: As also in all his epistles, speaking of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable" [men of an unteachable, light and wavering mind] *wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*—Beware lest ye also, being led away with *the error of the wicked*, &c." The other passage of scripture alluded to above, is in the 2 Thess. chap. ii. where the apostle speaks of some, who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." He immediately subjoins: "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should *believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth*, &c." Now, if persons may wrest the scriptures; not only those which are really
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16 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

"hard to be understood," but also the "other scriptures," to their own destruction; and if there are some, who are given over to "strong delusion," and believe a lie, to their own damnation; then it is certain, that men may err fatally concerning the way of life. If there be any fundamental truths, there must of consequence be fundamental errors; or such as shall be fatal in their consequences. And this is evidently supposed, not only in these, but in many other passages of scripture. From whence arises the necessity of great care in inquiring after the way of life, and caution against deception with reference thereto. Nor can any man be supposed heartily to desire, and earnestly to strive, that he may enter in at the strait gate, unless he exerciseth care and diligence in this respect.

IF it should be demanded here, What errors are fatal? this, it is conceived, ought to be left to the judgment of God. No man can presume, without arrogance, pride and impiety, particularly to run the line between essential and non-essential articles of faith; or, which comes to the same thing, between such errors as shall be absolutely fatal, and such as shall not. If God himself has not explicitly determined these questions, as he has not, what unwarrantable presumption is it in men to do it; as the manner of some is! Tho' the way of salvation revealed, be but one; tho' this may be fatally misapprehended by the careless

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less and negligent ; and tho', for this reason, we ought to use diligence that we may be rightly informed ; yet it is certain, that all mistakes and errors respecting the way of life, are not fatal : For who then could be saved ! It may be subjoined here, that tho' the careless and slothful may err fatally ; yet it will by no means follow from hence, that those may also err thus, who are seriously inquisitive ; those who take Jesus Christ for their guide, and heartily desire to know the truth as it is in him. It would be a great reflexion on the goodness and mercy of God, and on the holy scriptures, to suppose, either that every mistake in such fallible creatures respecting the way of life, should be damning ; or, that we might sincerely and earnestly endeavour, in the use of proper means, to learn the way of salvation from Jesus Christ, or the scriptures of truth, and yet not find it, but err from it in any essential point. The former of these suppositions would in effect divest God of his mercy ; and the latter of them would infer the scriptures to be inadequate to the declared design of them, which is, to guide our feet into the way of peace, and make us " wise unto salvation ; " which the apostle asserts, they are " able " to do. And whosoever denies this protestant, and truly apostolic doctrine, ought to go to Rome for a living, visible and infallible guide ; unless, perhaps, he had rather set up to be one himself.

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18 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

In fine here: Striving to enter into life, manifestly implies great care in seeking the way that leadeth thereto. In all the concerns of this mortal life, when we are heartily engaged in any pursuit, or endeavour to accomplish any end, we are careful lest we should take some wrong step to our prejudice; except in such cases as we apprehend admit of no doubt or uncertainty. And we do, or at least we ought to, act from the same general principle in the infinitely higher concerns of religion. Neither can we be supposed really to strive, that we may enter in at the strait gate, unless we are solicitous to know the truth as it is in Jesus, in some proportion to the importance of it, as it relates to our eternal salvation.

5thly. This striving implies in it, earnest prayer to God for the illumination of his holy spirit; for his guidance and direction in the way of life; for the pardon of our sins; for a new heart, and right spirit; and that he w^ould purge our consciences from dead works, to serve him in newness of life. Prayer is one, and indeed a most important way, of striving; to the use of which means, there are so many exhortations and injunctions in the holy scriptures, and which are so generally known, that it seems unnecessary at present to refer you to any in particular. And certainly no person who neglects this, can be supposed to strive as he ought to do.

6thly. THIS

6thly. **THIS** undoubtedly implies in it, striving against sin; watchfulness against temptation; a resolute opposition to the lusts and corruptions of our own hearts; and an endeavour to forsake and avoid all those evil practices which God has forbidden in his word; and for the sake of which, his wrath cometh on the children of disobedience. For surely that man cannot be said to strive to obtain salvation, who does not endeavour to avoid those sins, and unrighteous deeds, against which he knows the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

7thly. **THIS** implies a real endeavour, not only to abstain from what God has forbidden; but to do whatsoever he has required, or to obey all his known commandments. For our blessed Saviour has said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven." And one would think it hardly possible for any man to deceive himself so much, as to imagine that he really strives to enter in at the strait gate, without endeavouring to comply with the known will of God. This striving plainly implies a sincere desire to avoid every thing in general that may obstruct, and to do every thing in general which may promote, a man's future well-being.—It is, however, very far
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20 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

from being the design of what is here said, that we should do thus under the notion of meriting salvation thereby; or performing such a righteousness as God is obliged in justice to accept. This were the greatest folly. Whatever we do, we are unprofitable servants; yea, worse than unprofitable; for we are still sinful creatures. And being such, can reasonably hope for eternal life, only as the gift of God thro' Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath redeemed us from the curse of the law. And a dependence upon him, as the mediator between God and men, is implied in the very notion of striving to obtain salvation thro' him.

8thly, THE striving here enjoined, must be supposed to intend striving with perseverance; not for a month, a year, or any definite, given time; but as long as it shall please God to continue us in the world. For if any, after striving thus for a time, and in some measure escaping the pollutions of the world, relapse into their former careless and sinful way of life, the apostle compares them to a "dog that returneth to his vomit, and a sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." Yea, he saith of such persons, that it "had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than thus to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

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IF it should be asked, Whether any unregenerate sinner can be supposed to strive in the manner represented above? I answer, Yes; at least in general. There is very little, if any thing, in this account of striving, &c. which would necessarily suppose a person to be already born of the Spirit. But if it should be farther demanded, Whether a sinner can be supposed to strive thus, antecedent to any influence or operation of the good spirit of God upon his heart? The answer is, By no means. God undoubtedly strives with sinful men, by his word, his spirit, and the dispensations of his providence; awakening them to a sense of their guilt, misery and danger, antecedently to their striving, or doing any thing tending to their salvation: So that when any are finally brought to love him, it is "because he first loved them." But yet such influences of the word and spirit of God upon the hearts of men, as serve to awaken in them a serious concern about their salvation, and excite them to strive in order thereto, do not infer them to be new creatures in Christ Jesus. My meaning is, that there may be, and always are, such awakenings and strivings, prior to that thorough change of disposition and affections, which the scriptures express by a new heart, the new creature, and being born of God. — It may be subjoined here, to prevent misconstruction, that tho' no sinner

22 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

sinner strives, but with whom God strives first; yet it will not from hence follow, that God strives with none, besides those who strive in consequence thereof. God is represented as striving with many, who, instead of yielding to the impressions of his grace, resist, grieve and quench his good spirit; till they are utterly forsaken of him, and given over to a reprobate mind: In conformity to his own threatening, that his "Spirit shall not always strive with man."†

II. I was, in the next place, to shew you the fatal consequences of not striving to enter in at the strait gate: Or, in other words, of not using your endeavours to obtain eternal life, in the manner represented above. And here it is to be observed in general, that striving is indispensably necessary; so necessary, that without it we can never see the kingdom of God. It is not now asserted, that if we strive aright, we shall certainly be succeeded in our endeavours: But let the success of our endeavours be ever so uncertain; let it be supposed altogether doubtful, whether our striving shall issue in our salvation, or not; yet it is certain, on the

† Tho' the scriptures speak of God as striving; yet this seems not literally and strictly ascribed to him. For striving, in the ordinary import of the word, connotes weakness, or a limited power, which meets with opposition, obstructions and difficulties: Whereas God is almighty; a being, to whom nothing is hard, nothing difficult, which he resolves to do.

the other hand, that if we do not strive, we shall never obtain eternal life. This is no doubtful point, whatever the other may be. That the consequences of our negligence in this respect, will be fatal, is infallibly certain, though the happy consequences of using our endeavours, should be ever so problematical, or precarious. However free the grace of God is, it is manifest that he has required something of us in order to our salvation. And our Lord here enjoins us to strive to this end: Which is a general command, comprehending various things in it, as we have seen above. And can we suppose that our Saviour would have commanded us to strive, if striving were unnecessary to the end proposed? or, if we might finally enter in at the strait gate without striving? This cannot be reasonably supposed.

BESIDES: If any should imagine that striving is unnecessary, this would be to suppose that every thing is unnecessary, which properly comes under the head of striving; every thing which is presupposed and implied therein, according to the account already given of it, supposing that to be a just one. For example: It would be to suppose that sinners, to whom the gospel is preached, may inherit eternal life without giving any credit thereto; without being awakened into a sense of their guilt and

24. *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

and misery ; without desiring to be saved ; without endeavouring to learn the way of life ; without prayer to God ; without endeavouring to forsake their sins ; and without endeavouring to do the will of God. All these things are presupposed and implied in striving ; and consequently, if striving be unnecessary, these are unnecessary. But can any man who believes the holy scriptures to be the word of God, (and to such only I am speaking) possibly imagine that these things are unnecessary !—That a man may finally obtain the salvation revealed thro' Christ, altho' he rejects the revelation thereof ; altho' he continues hardened in his sins ; altho' he has no desire to obtain eternal life ; altho' he never seriously enquires the way that leadeth thereto ; altho' he never prays to God for his pardon, Spirit and grace ; altho' he freely indulges, instead of mortifying his lusts ; and in fine, tho' he takes no pains, uses no endeavours, to keep God's commandments, but wilfully violates them from day to day ; and continues so to do to the end of his life ! It is so manifest from the whole tenor of scripture, that such a man cannot be saved, but must perish in his sins, that it were a mis-spence of time to prove it, by an induction of particular passages.

It being certain then, and most manifest from the holy scriptures, that we cannot finally enter in at the strait gate, unless we exert our
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selves, and strive in order thereto ; from hence appear the fatal consequences of negligence in this respect. I say consequences, and fatal consequences ; for these three things are evidently contained, or implied, in being excluded from the kingdom of heaven : The loss, or falling short of eternal life, glory and happiness ; suffering the punishment, to which we are justly liable as sinners ; and an additional weight of woe and misery due to us, as despisers of the mercy and grace of God.

BEING excluded from the kingdom of heaven, implies in it the loss, or falling short of eternal life, glory and happiness. The strait gate is the gate of life, of joy, of glory, honor and immortality : So that, not to enter in thereat, is to be forever excluded from these blessings ; from the favour of God, and from the everlasting joys that are in his presence ; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away ; for it is in heaven, that this inheritance is reserved ; and it can be enjoyed only by those, who shall finally enter in at the strait gate.

THIS farther implies, the suffering of that punishment, to which we are justly liable as sinners. For, to be excluded from heaven, is in effect to be thrust down to hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched ;

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26 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

there being no medium, no middle way for us, between being saved and damned. As sinful creatures, we are already exposed to perdition from the avenging justice of God: yea, we are actually under a sentence of condemnation and death, till such time as we are delivered therefrom, by having an interest in the redemption wrought out by Christ. For, it is to them only that are in Christ Jesus, and so in him as to walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit, that there is no condemnation. Now, how terrible a thing is it to lie forever under guilt, the condemnation of God? How holy a being is he? how great his hatred of sin? how unlimited his power to punish it? how awful his threatnings, and how sure the execution of them upon finally-hardened and irreclaimable transgressors? Is it not a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God? Is not destruction from the Almighty a terror to us!—especially such an everlasting destruction from his presence, and the glory of his power, as is threatned in his word! And whatever, foolish, false-hearted men may imagine, or however flatter themselves with the hopes of impunity, “God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent.”

It is farther to be observed here, that those who are favoured with the gospel, and yet neglect

lest to strive after the salvation revealed therein, will incur an additional weight of woe and misery, as despisers of the grace and mercy of God. He has provided and revealed a way of salvation, for sinful, guilty and lost creatures, thro' the mediation, the sufferings and death of his own dear Son; and saith, "Whosoever will, let him come," &c. God exerciseth patience and forbearance towards his sinful creatures; thereby giving them time and opportunity for repentance, and working out their salvation. Now, if you should neglect this method of deliverance from condemnation, and think everlasting life not worth your striving after; you will not only remain under the guilt of your other sins, but will be justly chargeable also with despising the goodness of God; even the "riches of his goodness, forbearance and long-suffering": And if you do so, you must needs "treasure up unto your selves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Your guilt and punishment will be greatly aggravated in this respect. You will not only be condemned as sinners in the day of judgment; but as the most heinous sinners: you will not only be cast into the place of torments; but have your part amongst the most wretched that suffer there. In conformity hereto, our Lord himself denounced a peculiar woe against the inhabitants of Corazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum,

28 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

naum, where he had preached the gospel of the kingdom, because they repented not ; assuring them, that it should be more tolerable for those of Tyre and Sydon, for Sodom and Gomorrha, in the day of judgment, than for them. Thus also it is said in the epistle to the Hebrews : “ If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward ; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, ” &c. ? And again : “ If he that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy, — of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall they be thought worthy, who have trodden under foot the Son of God, ” &c. ?

You see then, what is to be the portion of those who neglect, instead of striving to obtain, the salvation revealed in the gospel. They will not only be excluded from eternal glory and happiness in the kingdom of God, continue under wrath, and suffer as transgressors of God’s law ; but also incur a peculiarly aggravated condemnation, as despisers of that mercy, which provided and revealed a method of salvation for sinners. Such will be the fatal consequences of not striving. And I am, in the next place,

III. To

III. To represent to you the happy and glorious consequences of striving successfully, or so as finally to enter in at the strait gate; without pretending to determine at present, whether your endeavours to this end will certainly be effectual, or not. But this is at least a possible supposition: And, O! what would you gain, if your endeavours should actually be crowned with success! This appears, in some measure, from what has been said under the preceeding head of discourse; so that there will be the less occasion, as indeed there is not time, for much enlargement here. Success in these endeavors will be abundantly sufficient, yea, infinitely more than sufficient, to reward all the pains you take, or can take, even tho' you should spend a thousand, or ten million years, in the most intense application; and allow yourselves no rest day or night. For, on this supposition, you will obtain eternal deliverance from guilt, condemnation and wrath: And not only so, but be compleatly and everlastingly blessed.

You will obtain eternal deliverance from guilt, condemnation and wrath. The wages of sin, you know, is death; or everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Now a primary, or main end of the striving enjoined upon us in the text, is, obtaining deliverance from a state of guilt, misery and ruin; or from the wrath which is to come upon the world.

III. To

30 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

world of the ungodly ; as appears from what has been discoursed above. So that success in these endeavours, or in this striving, implies in the very notion of it, obtaining a full and final release from all our sins, and from the punishment due to them. And how glorious a privilege is this ! Blessed indeed is he, whose transgressions are thus forgiven, and whose sin is covered ; yea, thrice blessed is that man, unto whom the Lord will not impute iniquity ! —who shall never come into condemnation ! If it should be said, that to be exempted from punishment, is but a negative happiness ; or that it implies no positive good in it ; be it so. Yet surely, deliverance from evil is worth striving for ; especially, from so great an evil, as the damnation of hell. Tho' this were *all* that we could hope to obtain by striving ; yet, doubtless, our endeavours to this end would be well bestowed.

BUT, as was before observed, if you strive effectually, you will not only obtain deliverance from sin and death ; but be the heirs of eternal life and glory. That narrow gate, into which you strive to enter, is the gate of life, the gate of heaven. And consequently, if you strive effectually, you will gain admission into the mansions of everlasting joy. " Eye hath not indeed seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which
God

God hath prepared for them that love him." But, from what he hath revealed unto us by his Spirit, we know in general that the heavenly state is a state of perfect holiness and happiness; an happiness adapted to the rational nature of man; adequate to his most exalted wishes; yea, far surpassing all his present conceptions; an happiness which will never be interrupted or diminished; but constant, immutable and eternal. And if there were but a bare possibility of obtaining such an happiness as this, what reasonable man would not strive in order to it? especially when the certain consequences of neglecting to do so, are taken into consideration!

WHAT connexion there is between our striving, and actually obtaining the salvation of our souls, according to the holy scriptures, is, by divine permission and assistance, to be considered in another discourse. But the present must not be concluded without some short reflexions on what has been said already.

And,

1. It appears, that there is something required of, and to be *done* by sinful men, in order to their salvation. Our Lord commands us to strive to enter in at the strait gate; and certainly this implies the doing something; yea,

32 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

yea, of many things, with a view to obtaining eternal life. Nor is there a single command of Christ in the gospel, but what ought to be obeyed, partly with this view ; though not indeed, under the notion of meriting salvation thereby. How strange ? how unaccountable is it then, that any should assert, as some have done, that there is nothing to be done by sinners, in order to their salvation ; or at least, nothing besides believing ! And some there are, who have gone so far as to say, that the very inquiry, What men are to do to obtain eternal life, is an indication of a self-righteous spirit ; and a proof, that the person who makes it, knows nothing of the gospel-dispensation ! What strange infatuation is this ! And with how much truth and propriety might it be retorted, that those who have such a conception of the gospel, are themselves grossly ignorant of it ; and need to be taught, even the first principles of the oracles of God ?

2. IT farther appears, how much those are mistaken, who suppose that the working out their salvation is an *easy* matter ; attended with few or no difficulties ; and rather a matter of amusement, than of great pains, labor and self-denial ; of the most intense application, and vigorous exertions. Our Saviour, who certainly knew every thing relating to this affair, enjoins us to “ strive ; ” or, if the word may be

may be allowed, to "agonize," that we may enter into life: Plainly importing, that the business of religion is at once of such vast importance, and attended with such difficulties, as to call for the most anxious concern, the most fixed resolutions, and unwearied endeavours. And there are divers metaphors used in scripture, relative to this matter, which naturally suggest the same thing to us: Particularly those of "wrestling," "running," and "fighting;" which express efforts of strength and activity, joined with wariness and circumspection. These are all applied to the exercises, duties and employments of the christian life; as if a man were to be almost continually exerting himself, and upon his guard, as in a race, a fight, or some other exercise, which at once requires care, dexterity, and a vigorous exertion of strength: And surely heaven is not prepared as a receptacle, or mighty hive, for the drones of the earth! But if we were to judge by the conduct of some professed christians, and those, perhaps, not the worst that the world affords, we should be apt to think, that to be, and to live the life of, a christian, was a thing of the greatest ease: and, as was intimated before, rather a matter of amusement, than of habitual care, pains and labor. For how many are there, who apparently, instead of making the salvation of their souls their grand concern, the object of their most earnest endeavours, consider it rather as something which is beside the main business of life; something subordinate,

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34 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

ordinate, not only to the getting riches or power, but even to their *other* diversions and pastimes? There are many persons of this character in the world; who may yet think themselves in the way of salvation, because they make a profession of religion; because they attend the public worship—when it suits their *humour*; and are not openly vicious in their lives. But such persons will be certainly disappointed, if they expect, in this way, ever to get admission into the kingdom of heaven. For can they, with any propriety of language, be said to strive to enter in at the strait gate? or can they enter there, without striving? What they really strive for, is to obtain wealth, worldly honors, worldly pleasures, and the meat that perisheth; not the pearl of great price, not that honor that cometh from God, not those pleasures that are at his right hand, not the meat that endureth unto everlasting life. Let none delude themselves with an imagination, that they are in that “narrow way” that leadeth unto life everlasting, while they live after this thoughtless, negligent and loose manner; nor unless they strive in earnest to enter in at the strait gate, as a matter of infinite concernment to them; in comparison of which, all other things are of trivial consequence, hardly worth a serious thought. This is indeed, what our Lord intends when he says, “one thing is needful.” And blessed are they, who are so wise as, with Mary, to “choose that good part, that shall not be taken away from them.”

3. You

3. You may see, by what has been said, not only that striving is necessary in order to entering into life ; but also, that the *manner* of striving is of great importance. People may take considerable pains in religion, with a view to their future happiness ; and yet, thro' criminal inattention, not " strive lawfully," or in the manner they ought to do ; and so never enter into life. To strive to enter in at the strait gate, is an injunction of Jesus Christ ; and therefore must be supposed to mean, striving in a way that is in general agreeable to the plan of the gospel, the doctrine of our redemption. And if, thro' vicious prejudice, or even thro' want of such attention as might be reasonably expected of us, we should wholly mistake in this matter ; whatever we do, must, on the most favourable supposition, go for nothing. Unless we strive, in general, in the manner we ought to do, allowing for involuntary mistakes, we are not in the way that leadeth unto life. And if we are not in that narrow way, we are of consequence travelling towards the wide gate of destruction ; and shall unquestionably, unless we alter our course, increase the vast and wretched number of those, that go in thereat !—Of this, however, there is no real danger, if we earnestly endeavour to be rightly informed : For, of those who are favoured with the gospel, if there be few that find the way of life, it *must* be, because there are but few who seasonably and diligently inquire after it : Tho' this is certainly one thing implied in striving.

36 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

4. LET me earnestly exhort all to strive. Tho' your endeavours should prove ineffectual; yet, as that is supposed at present to be an uncertainty, you are obliged in all reason to do your best, leaving the event with God. For this is the situation, the dilemma you are in, as guilty creatures: If you do not strive to obtain deliverance from condemnation, you will, you *must*, continue under it, and be miserable hereafter. But if you strive, it is at least possible that you *may* obtain deliverance from the wrath to come, and be eternally happy. And can you hesitate, in this situation, which is the wiser part to take! Do you not strive, in your worldly concerns, when at as great uncertainty about the success of your endeavours? And yet those are matters of no importance, in comparison with this: "For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" In *those* affairs, tho' you did not exert yourselves with vigor, the damage could be but small, comparatively speaking; and the gain is but small and temporary, when your endeavours are successful. But in *this*, if you are careless and negligent, you perish in your sins, and are ruined forever: And if you strive successfully, as perhaps you may, your gain is infinite; a treasure that faileth not, a kingdom that hath foundations, a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

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BUT to conclude: If there are any who will not strive to enter in at the strait gate of life, let them be persuaded at least, not to take pains to go in at that which leadeth to destruction; which is altogether needless. For this gate is wide, ready to receive all that come; the way thereto is broad, so that it can hardly be missed; and there are many who, even without taking pains for it, go in thereat. But yet there are some persons, who seem to strive, and take great pains, to enter in at this wide gate: I mean all such as endeavour to stifle the convictions of their own consciences; to persuade themselves, that the christian revelation is a fable, and to quench the Spirit of God, that striveth with them. There are undoubtedly some, who really take pains to rid themselves of every religious and moral principle; of all the restraints of conscience, which they find troublesome to them; which is no easy thing, especially for those who have had a religious education. Some there are, who seem to endeavour to excel in wickedness; who pride themselves in impiety and vice; in profane cursing and swearing, in drinking, wantonness and riot: Who even "weary themselves to do iniquity;" and afterwards glory in their shame. Now, all such persons may be said to strive, not to save, but to destroy their own souls. But how unnecessary a labor is this! And if even the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall such ungodly sinners appear!—"Wo unto him that
striveth

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38 *Striving to enter in at the strait Gate*

striveth [thus] *with his MAKER*: Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth."—Do not, I beseech you, so foolishly, so wickedly, as to "seek death in the error of your life!" Our Lord says, in allusion to the taking a city by storm, that the "kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." The kingdom of heaven is thus to be taken; and there is at once glory and gain in such a conquest. But what occasion is there, so to express it, for storming hell, whose gates are ever wide extended, to receive every comer! There is no occasion for any formal siege, for any assault or violence, in order to get admittance into that place of torments: And tho' there were, yet there would be neither honor nor advantage to reward the exploit.—But why do I speak thus to you, my friends and brethren? I hope in God, there are no such abandoned sinners amongst my hearers; tho' there may probably be some persons, who take little or no pains to obtain salvation; and who are therefore particularly concerned in this admonition:—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

SERMON II.

SERMON II.

The Connexion between striving after, and obtaining Salvation, proved from the holy Scriptures.

LUKE XIII. 24.

STRIVE to enter in at the strait gate.—

BY the strait gate is intended, the gate of life, or of the kingdom of heaven. It is called strait, in respect of the difficulties which attend gaining admission into those blessed mansions. By striving to enter at this gate, is meant in general, using our sincere endeavours to obtain eternal life. But, more particularly, this striving presupposes and comprehends in it, a speculative belief of the christian revelation; a sense of our sinful, perishing condition; an earnest desire to obtain the salvation revealed thro' Christ; serious and diligent inquiry after the way of life; prayer to God for the pardon of sin, for his spirit and grace; striving against sin, with an endeavour to keep all God's commandments; still relying,
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not on any supposed merit in what we do, but on the mercy of God in Christ, for acceptance with him. All which implies a partial reformation, or a good work begun in the sinner, by the word and spirit of God ; tho' it does not necessarily imply *that* thorough change, which the scriptures express by a new and clean heart, by the new creature, and by being born of the Spirit.—Striving to enter in at the strait gate, is indispensably necessary in order to our salvation. Without it we shall certainly fall short of eternal life, continue under condemnation, and incur an additional degree of guilt and misery, as despisers of the grace of God. Such will be the consequences of not striving. On the other hand, if we strive effectually, we shall obtain deliverance from the wrath to come ; and be inexpressibly and eternally happy in the kingdom, presence and enjoyment of God, the supreme good. So that we have great reason to strive, tho' there were but a bare possibility, that our endeavours may be crowned with success.

THE several things here mentioned in a cursory manner, were enlarged on in the preceding discourse, under three general heads. And there now remains only one point to be considered, in order to finish the design which I had, when I entered on this subject. And that is,

IV. WHAT

IV. **WHAT** connexion there is, according to the word of God, betwixt our striving, and finally obtaining what is the grand end and object of our endeavours, the salvation of our souls.

SOME persons, and indeed not a few, have supposed that there is no certain connexion between any strivings or endeavours of sinners, and their obtaining eternal life: While others have supposed that our success is certain, provided we strive as we may and ought to do, to enter in at the strait gate. To consider this matter, by the light of God's holy word, and by his assistance, is proposed as the business of this discourse. And I shall beg leave to introduce what I have to offer upon it, with some short remarks, tending to a just and clear stating of the point. The first of which is,

I. **THAT** the question does not relate to the striving, or endeavours, of the regenerate; of those that are already born of God, or such as are, in the most proper sense, true believers and real christians. The question is not, Whether the endeavours of such, to obtain salvation, shall be effectual or not? For it is allowed on all hands, that they shall infallibly be so. All acknowledge, that the gospel plainly and directly promises eternal life to persons of this character. So that the present inquiry

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has no relation to such : And consequently, it must relate wholly to the endeavours of the unregenerate.

2dly. THE question is not, Whether sinners can be finally saved, without becoming true believers, or real christians, in the most proper sense ? Concerning this matter, there is no more controversy, than there is about the point last mentioned. For it is allowed on all hands, that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord ; or ever gain admission into the kingdom of heaven. This is therefore no part of the question before us. Neither,

3dly. Is the question, Whether a sinful creature can attain to true holiness, and so be entitled to eternal life, merely by any endeavours of his own, or without the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God ? It is generally, if not universally, agreed amongst professed christians, that repentance unto life, and evangelical holiness, are not attainable without the gracious operations of God's holy Spirit ; and consequently, that without these divine influences, all the endeavours of sinners to attain to holiness, and so to eternal life, must be ineffectual. Which indeed amounts to neither more nor less, than what our Lord himself declares,—That “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom
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dom of God." Christians do indeed differ considerably in their manner of explaining themselves upon this subject : But there are few or none, but what do in general assert the necessity of divine grace, or the influences of God's Spirit, in order to a saving conversion ; or in order to a sinner's attaining to holiness here, and happiness hereafter. And this is now taken for granted, as a certain and important truth. So that it is no part of the present question, whether the endeavours of sinners will be effectual to their salvation, without the grace of God vouchsafed to them, so as to create in them clean hearts, and right spirits ? For it is certain, they will not. Neither,

4thly. Is the present question, Whether God is obliged, in justice, to renew or change the heart of a sinner, in consequence of his endeavours, prayers, or any thing which he can be supposed to do ? Or, in other words, is obliged, in point of justice, to succeed the endeavours of sinners, in order to their attaining to holiness and eternal life ? It is generally allowed, that God is not bound in justice thus to succeed a sinner's endeavours ; at least, this is now taken for granted. And to suppose that God is obliged, in point of equity, to do this, would be most absurd, not to say impious. For, as sinners, we have forfeited all right to God's favour ; to any good whatsoever ; and are just-

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ly liable to wrath and punishment. And if so, it is a manifest inconsistency to suppose, that any thing which a sinner does, or can do, should merit his favourable regards ; or justly entitle him to those influences of the holy Spirit, which are necessary, and which will be effectual, to the sinner's salvation. This would be, to suppose him justly liable to wrath for his sins, and at the same time to have a just claim to salvation on account of his endeavours : For to have a just claim to salvation, and to have a claim of right to those renewing influences of God's Spirit, which have salvation connected with them, amount to the same thing at last : And so the suppositions are equally irrational, From whence it follows,

5thly. **THAT** if there be any certain connexion between the endeavours of sinful creatures to obtain eternal life, and their actually obtaining it, this is a connexion which the free grace, or unmerited goodness of God, has made and established : And so can be known, only by the gracious promises or declarations of his word : For, between God's justice and his grace there is no medium. If there be such a connexion, which does not arise from the former, as certainly it cannot ; it must of consequence flow from the latter. And this can be known only from divine revelation : For it is only from the word, declarations and promises

mises of God, that we can certainly know, to what particular objects, in what manner and measure, when, and under what circumstances, God will exercise grace, or shew mercy to the guilty. Wherefore,

6thly. UPON laying these several things together, you will please to observe, that the inquiry before us really comes to this at last, viz. Whether there are in the word of God, any gracious promises, invitations, or declarations, respecting unregenerate sinners, to whom the gospel is preached, from whence it may be clearly inferred, that if they strive in the manner they may and ought to do, to attain to holiness and eternal life, God will certainly afford them all the influences of his Spirit and grace, which are necessary to that end: So that their endeavours shall not be in vain, but succeeded by him, and rendered effectual to their salvation? This, it is humbly conceived, is a fair, just and plain state of the important question proposed.—It may, however, be stated somewhat differently thus, without altering the true import of it, viz. Whether the gracious declarations and promises of God in his word, are such as will in any measure admit of the supposition, that unregenerate sinners, to whom the gospel is preached, may desire, strive, and earnestly endeavour, in the use of proper means, to obtain the salvation revealed therein,

therein, seeking to God for his grace and assistance ; and yet possibly fall short of eternal life, and perish in their sins, by reason that God with-holds his Spirit and grace from them? The question thus stated, comes precisely to the same thing, as in the former way. Or it may be reduced to another form, and still narrower compass, thus : viz. Whether unregenerate sinners, under the dispensation of the Gospel, have *any* day of grace and salvation afforded to them ; in such a sense, that they shall certainly obtain eternal life, provided they heartily desire it, and strive to that end?— I have expressed the true point in question, in these several ways, not merely for the sake of having it clearly understood ; but partly, because I supposed, that the bare stating it thus, would go a considerable ways towards a proper resolution of it, with those that are tolerably acquainted with the general tenor of holy scripture ; unless their minds are unhappily prepossessed in favor of some unscriptural scheme of systematical divinity.

HAVING prepared the way by these previous remarks, I shall now proceed more directly to what I had principally in view ; which was to prove, by arguments drawn from the holy scriptures, That there is a certain connexion between sinners striving to obtain the salvation which God has revealed, and their actually obtaining

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obtaining it.* By arguments drawn from holy scripture, are not, however, intended, only such as are drawn from scripture-promises; but also from any doctrine or declaration of scripture: For if arguments are fairly and justly deduced from the word of God, or are conclusive, it is immaterial from what particular topic they are taken. And you are desired to observe, that I do not put the intire decision of this point, upon the absolute conclusiveness of every single argument, or passage of scripture, that shall be alledged; but upon the joint force, the concurring evidence, and result of all. For it will be sufficient, if the conclusion fairly results from them all, considered collectively, altho' it should not, from any one of them separately taken. Accordingly, it is to be observed here,

(1.) THAT mankind being considered in scripture, as in a state of sin and death, it is declared that Jesus Christ came into the world, to save them; to "save sinners"; to "seek and to save that which was lost."

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* To avoid unnecessary repetitions, the reader is desired to remember, (1.) That, in this discourse, by sinners, unregenerate sinners are always meant. And (2.) That when their strivings, or endeavours, are spoken of, this must be understood in general of such strivings, or endeavours, as are described in the preceeding discourse. I say, in general: for possibly one or two expressions used in that description, are in strictness applicable to the endeavours of the regenerate only; tho' I am not at present sensible of any such.

In conformity whereto, the angel that appeared to the terrified shepherds on the night of his nativity, comforted them with the following words: — “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all people*: For unto you is born — a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, *good will towards men*” [indefinitely.] Agreeably hereto it is declared, that Christ “gave himself a ransom for all”; that he “died for all;” and that he “tasted death for every man.” And our Lord commanded his apostles to preach the gospel, or these glad tidings, to “every creature.” This is called the “gospel of the grace of God;” and professes to point out a method of salvation for sinners. The apostle Paul says, with reference hereto: “The grace of God that *bringeth salvation*, hath appeared unto *all men* †; teaching us,” &c. Now, from such declarations of holy scripture, we may fairly infer, that all those, to whom the gospel is preached, have therein an offer of salvation made to them. For in what other view can it

† Tit II. 11. The original words might, perhaps, be translated with more propriety—“The grace of God *that bringeth salvation to all men*, hath appeared; teaching us,” &c. So they are rendered in the margin of some of our bibles. And being thus understood, they will be rather more direct and full to the point in view.

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it be considered, as glad tidings of great joy to all that hear it? In what other view can it be properly called, the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men? And if it really makes an offer, or points out a method of salvation to all; can it be supposed that any sinner, who is willing, and desirous, and strives, to obtain the salvation thus revealed, should yet be rejected of God, and finally perish? Certainly it cannot.

(2.) GOD hath declared in the most solemn manner, that he hath no pleasure in the death of sinners: "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Yea, it is declared, that God "will have all men to be saved." Now, if what these declarations most obviously and strongly import, be true; surely all who really desire and strive to obtain eternal life, will certainly obtain it. For if God himself hath no pleasure in their death, but the contrary; and if they themselves desire life, and endeavour to obtain it, what should hinder their salvation? Can the devil be supposed to prevent it, on these suppositions? He cannot, unless he is stronger, not only than man, but than God himself!

(3.) ACCORDING to the representations of scripture, God affords to sinners a space for repentance, a day of grace and salvation; or a season for making their peace with him; during which time,

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he is said to be "near", so that he "may be found" by them that seek him. Yea, God is represented as long-suffering towards them, being unwilling that they should perish. To which purpose are the following passages, amongst innumerable others. "Seek ye the Lord *while he may be found* ; call ye upon him *while he is near*. Let the wicked forsake his way ;" * &c. "*To day*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the day of temptation—Forty years was I grieved with this generation," § &c. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, *whiles thou art in the way with him* ; lest," &c. "He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least *in this thy day*, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now," ‡ &c. "I gave her *a space to repent*—and she repented not" †.—"Receive not the grace of God in vain—For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee : Behold now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation ‡§". "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness ; but is *long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that ANY should perish*, but that ALL should come to repentance†§." Now, is it consistent with these repeated declarations, to suppose that sinners, during this time of their visitation, may really desire and strive to enter in at

* Isai. LV. 7.

§ Psal. XCV. 7.

‡ Luke XIX. 41. 42.

† Rev. II. 21.

‡§ 2 Cor. VI. 1, 2.

‡§ 2 Pet. III. 9.

at the strait gate ; and yet fall short of salvation ? If God is long-suffering, “ not willing that any” of those sinners, to whom the gospel is preached, should perish, but that “ all” should come to repentance ; certainly he puts them all into a capacity for attaining salvation. To suppose that any are left in such a state, that they cannot avoid perishing, tho’ they desire it ; or in such a state, as renders repentance impossible for them ; manifestly supposes, that God *wills them to perish*, that he *would not* have them come to repentance ; nor really allows them a space for it, in any proper sense : And so is directly contrary to the doctrine of scripture—But let the unbiassed judge.

(4.) IT is farther to be remarked, that during this space given for repentance, or that day of salvation, which the scriptures so plainly assert ; sinners are earnestly admonished, exhorted and commanded, to seek God, to be reconciled to him, and to work out their salvation. Thus in some of the passages but just now quoted——“ Seek the Lord while he may be found,” &c. “ To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” So in Prov I. “ Wisdom crieth without—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity ? and the scorers delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge ? Turn you at my reproof,” &c. And still more emphatical are the words of the apostle, in his second epistle to the Corinthians ; a part of which passage was

quoted before. But you may please to consider it more at large, as it here follows. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation: To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling THE WORLD unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, *as tho' God did beseech you by us*; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. We then as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace" [the gospel] "of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time," &c. These exhortations, and commands, are all directed more especially to sinners; to "the wicked"; to "simple ones", "scorners", and "fools"; to such as were not yet "reconciled to God". And can any unprejudiced man think it consistent with them, to suppose, that sinners may be awakened to such a sense of their misery in being in a state of alienation from God, as to desire to be reconciled to him, and really strive to obtain a part in the salvation thus revealed; and yet fail of it! Judge for yourselves—

(5.) CONFORM-

(5.) CONFORMABLY hereto, life and death, blessing and cursing, are said to be set before sinners, in the word of God ; and they are admonished to choose life— “ I call heaven and earth to record this day—that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing ; therefore choose life”, * &c. But, with what truth or propriety could life and death be said to be set before sinners, if tho’ they desired life, and heartily endeavour’d to obtain it, they might yet fail thereof ? On this supposition, it is only death that is really set before them, in any proper, consistent sense ; without any life or blessing, in opposition thereto—It were but a cavil to say, that Moses, or God by him, here addresses himself to the people of Israel upon the footing of mere law ; enjoining upon them perfect obedience thereto, as the condition of their attaining life ; and denouncing death against them in case of the least failure. They were already sinners, transgressors of the law, and are spoken of as such, in the verse immediately foregoing. So that in respect of mere law, they were under a curse already ; and were utterly incapacitated to obtain life on the footing of law. Nothing but death was before them in that respect, tho’ they had desired life. And yet life and blessing are said that day to have been set before them, as well as death and cursing : And they are admonished to choose life, as what was, at that time, attainable, if chosen ;

* Deut. XXX 19.

fen ; for it is added, — that thou and thy seed may live.” It is manifest therefore, that they were not here treated with upon the footing of mere law ; life being offered to, or set before them, for their choice, considered as sinners. And if so, the obtaining it depended on their choice, or was connected therewith. And doubtless, it is not less truly and properly set before sinners now, under the gospel dispensation, than it was before the Israelites in the time of Moses. From whence we may conclude, that if we really desire, and strive to enter into life, we shall not fall short of it.

(6.) THE scriptures speak of some sinners as wholly left, and forsaken of God, in this world ; given up to their own heart’s lust, to incurable blindness, to strong delusion, &c. that they “ might be damned.” Now if there is any such thing as such-like passages of scripture seem to assert, and as they are usually understood ; it will even from hence follow, that the persons thus given up of God, were, antecedently hereto, in a salvable state ; that they had in some measure the restraints and strivings of God’s spirit ; that they were really put into a capacity for obtaining salvation, had they desired it ; and that their not doing so, was the reason of their being thus forsaken. And this is agreeable to the representations of scripture, in those very passages, which are here alluded to— “ My people *would* not hear-
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ken to my voice, and Israel *would* none of me : So I gave them up," &c.— "If thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace ! but *now* they are hidden from thine eyes"— "They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved : And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion—— that they all might be damned." Their case is represented as being made desperate, by their being thus given up of God ; and this is ascribed to their neglect of a former opportunity, in which they were in a capacity for attaining salvation. And indeed, if they were not, the "things which belonged unto their peace", were really hid from their eyes before, as truly as afterwards. If God gave them up, because they would not hearken to his voice ; then they were not given up before they refused to do so ; but might have obtained life, had they sought after it : without which supposition, there seems to be no ground for any such distinction as is apparently made between their state before, and their state after, God thus gave them over.

(7.) THE scriptures speak plainly and directly of sinners neglecting the opportunity allowed them for obtaining life, as the real cause of their death or destruction.— "Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought all my counsel—I also will laugh at your calamity—

ty—when distress and anguish cometh upon you. THEN shall they call upon me ; but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.” * “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their hearts—unto whom I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.” † “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation,” ‡ &c. “Ye *will not* come unto me, that ye might have life.” § “O Jerusalem—how often would I have gathered thy children—and ye *would not* !” §§ These, with innumerable other passages of scripture, most clearly and strongly express this sentiment ; That the true and only reason why sinners perish, is, that they do not “regard” the hand of God, stretched out to save them ; that they “grieve” him by their obduracy in sin ; that they “neglect” the great salvation offered to them ; and “will not” come to Jesus Christ for life. But neither of these things can be truly and properly said of those persons, who are awakened to such a sense of their sins, as really to desire the salvation revealed, and to strive in order thereto ; even tho’ they are not (which is very supposable) already in a regenerate state. And therefore all such persons, unless they cease to desire and strive thus, shall be saved ; not, to be sure, without being born of God ; but they shall

* Prov. XXIV—28.
§ John V. 40.

† Psal. XCV. 10, 11. ‡ Heb. II. 3.
§§ Matt. XXIII 37.

shall be "renewed in the spirit of their minds;" and consequently enter into life.

(8.) SINNERS have a promise of the spirit of wisdom, or of spiritual wisdom, with which eternal life is connected, if they hearken to God's reproof, and diligently seek it. "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you: I will make known my words unto you."* "Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors."† That what is here promised, is spiritual wisdom and understanding, such as shall be saving, is not, I suppose, denied by any. But it will perhaps be said, that none but a regenerate man, can be supposed to "turn at God's, or wisdom's, reproof," or to "wait at the posts of her doors," in the sense here intended: and consequently, that none but such can be entitled to the promise, or blessing. But this were an arbitrary assertion; one, for which there is not the least colour or foundation. For the persons here addressed, are spoken to under the character of "simple ones," "scorners," and "fools"; who certainly need wisdom the most of any. And the promise is apparently made for the encouragement of such, to turn at her reproof, and to watch daily at her gates; that they might find her, and thereby "find life." This was therefore to be done by them, antecedently to their obtaining

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* Prov. I. 23.

† Chap. VII. 33, 34.

spiritual wisdom ; not in the actual exercise of it, as the regenerate, who are already wise unto salvation, are to seek for more wisdom. And unless these passages are so understood, the promise will really amount to this, and no more than this; *viz.* “ If ye who are now fools, and cannot be truly wise, but by turning at my reproof, shall first attain this wisdom some other way, and then turn in the exercise thereof, being actually possessed of wisdom ; *then* shall you find it, in consequence of such a turning, waiting and watching : behold, *then* will I pour out my spirit unto you ; *then* will I make known my words unto you.” This must really be the whole amount of this promise, unless it is supposed to be made to the turning, waiting and watching of an unregenerate man : But I may venture to appeal to any wise man, whether such a promise would be agreeable to the *wisdom of God* !

(9.) IN Ezekiel [chap. xxxvi.] God declares his purpose to do many things for the people of Israel ; and, amongst the rest, to give them a “ new heart” and a “ new spirit”. † But he adds afterwards, “ I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them ‡” : which unquestionably relates in part, to the new heart and new spirit, spoken of before. Upon which we may briefly remark, That eternal life, or salvation, is connected in scripture with the hav-

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† Ver. 26.

‡ Ver. 37.

ing a new heart : That such an heart is the gift of God : That he gives such an heart, not prior to, but in consequence of, being inquired of, or sought to, for it : And consequently, That the inquiring of God, here intended, is the act, not of the regenerate, but the unregenerate ; who are awakened to desire, and seek after it. So that altho this is not expressed in the *form* of a conditional promise ; yet it amounts to one : at least it implies, that the obtaining a new heart, has *some* connection with inquiring after it ; and that, in a manner in which an unregenerate man may be supposed to do. For it were highly absurd to suppose, that a man must have a new heart, in order to his inquiring of, or seeking God, in such a manner as to obtain such an heart of him !

(10.) OUR Saviour pronounces a blessing on those that " hunger and thirst after righteousness ;" adding, that " they shall be filled." * By which metaphors of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, our Lord unquestionably designed to express the strong and ardent desires of sinful creatures to attain the righteousness, and so the salvation, revealed in the gospel ; desires arising from a sense of their misery without it ; such desires as put them upon using their endeavours after it : Even as men who are ready to perish with hunger and thirst in a literal sense, will of course endeavour

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* Matt. V. 6.

your to obtain meat and drink. All such persons our Lord pronounces blessed: "for," says he, "they shall be filled." Which promise, or declaration, can intend nothing less, than that they shall actually attain to that righteousness and salvation, which they desire, and strive after. Now, there is not the least ground to doubt, but that convinced, awakened sinners, may and do often, thus hunger and thirst after righteousness. And if any should say, that the regenerate only, or such as have already attained unto righteousness, can be supposed to do so; this were altogether as contrary to reason and good sense, as to say, that a man must eat a *good meal*, in order to be hungry in a literal sense; and that he must drink a *heartly draught*, in order to be a-thirst—This benediction and promise, more especially respect unregenerate, heavy-laden sinners: as do also such gracious invitations and promises as these—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters—Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." § "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but—it shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." * "I am the bread of life: he that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me, shall never thirst." † "If any

§ Isa. LV. 1, 2.

* John IV. 14.

† Chap. VI. 35.

any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink—this he spake of the spirit, which they that believe on him should receive”—† “And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come: and *whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely.” § How unreasonable? how unscriptural, were it to suppose, that, by those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, our Lord intends only the regenerate; or such as have already eaten and drank of that spiritual bread and water, which he giveth?—Especially when he declareth above, that such persons shall *neither* hunger nor thirst again! “I am the bread of life; he that cometh unto me shall *never* hunger;—shall *never* thirst.” Can any man read this, and yet suppose, that hungering and thirsting after righteousness, in the sense of our saviour, to which the promise is made, is always subsequent, never prior, to coming to him, or to regeneration? If he can, however good his heart may be, no one has much reason to envy him his head.

(11.) To this promise of our Lord, another may be subjoined, which is also found in his sermon on the mount. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth, &c. What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?—If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts

† Chap. VII. 37–39.

§ Rev. XXII. 17.

gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him" *? Here you will observe, that the "good things" promised, are spiritual blessings; such as have eternal life connected with them; as is manifest from a parallel place in another evangelist, where these good things are explained to mean, the Holy Spirit—"How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" You will farther observe, that the obtaining these spiritual blessings is expressly connected with, and promised to, asking, seeking, knocking. But then it will perhaps be said, that this must be supposed to mean, the asking, &c. of the regenerate; and that it cannot be intended of the desires, prayers and endeavours of the unregenerate. But does there appear any good reason for limiting the promise in this manner? It is humbly conceived, there is none: But that it ought to be understood conformably to what our Lord had said before—that they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, shall be filled. The words were spoken by him to the promiscuous multitude of his professed followers: and there is no reason to suppose, that all these were then in a regenerate state. That any of them were so, cannot be inferred merely from God's being spoken of in this passage, under the character, or title, of their "Father" in heaven. For he is said to be the

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* Matt. VII. 7—11.

“God and Father of ALL”; not only of the regenerate, tho’ they are in a peculiar sense his children, his sons and daughters. This common Father has many evil and disobedient, as well as good and obedient children. And the persons here spoken to, are spoken to as *evil*. “If ye then, being *evil*”, &c. From whence it might be at least as fairly argued, that they were not in a regenerate state, as it could, that they were, from God’s being stiled their Father. For where do you find those that are born of God, his sons by adoption, and spiritual renovation, called *evil* in scripture? However, no great stress ought to be laid upon this: for even such persons may doubtless be stiled *evil* in a comparative sense; as our Lord says, “There is none *good* but One, that is God.” But there is still less reason to conclude these persons were born of God, from his being spoken of as their Father: For, as before observed, he is the Father of ALL: And all in common are directed to pray to him under this very character—“Our Father which art in heaven”—Had not this cavil been produced as a serious argument, and much insisted on by some, it would have been a shame to say so much about it: which must be my apology—I would farther observe here, that these promises of our Saviour to such as ask, seek and knock, seem to be more especially designed and calculated for the encouragement of the unregenerate to seek God, and spiritual blessings. For the “good things” promised,

mised, as explained by St. Luke, are such as are comprehended in the "gift of the holy spirit:" The promise of which, in consequence of asking, seeking and knocking, is so far from supposing that the persons who do so, are already regenerate, or that the spirit is given to them prior to their asking; that it rather implies the direct contrary; viz. that they had not the spirit, in the sense here intended by our Saviour. For if they are supposed, at the time of their asking, to have the spirit of God dwelling in them, to "abide with them for ever," as all the sons of God by regeneration and adoption have, what becomes of the promise? What are they to have in consequence of asking, &c? Is it only the continuance of the spirit, or larger measures of it?—But these are, I think, never called, *giving the spirit*, in the language of scripture: which means the *original* bestowment of it [or him] on such as were destitute of it; in consequence of which, they are said to be born of the spirit, or of God. As a man is but *once* born of God, or of the Spirit, so the Spirit is, properly speaking, never *given more than once*: For being once given, he is to "be in, and to abide with believers for ever." So that to say, as some have done, that they who have already the spirit of God, have indeed here a promise of his countenance, or of larger measures thereof; but that those who ask, being destitute of the spirit, have no promise of him made to them, is a most arbitrary, irrational construction

construction of this promise : A promise, which our blessed and merciful Redeemer particularly designed for the encouragement of those to ask, who most need the Spirit ;—"heavy-laden" sinners ; that so, applying themselves to God in their extremity, " they may be made free from the law of sin and death, by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus ; and for the future walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." *

It will greatly confirm what has been said upon this point, if we consider,

(12.) THAT the apostle Peter speaks of God, as having " given unto us all things pertaining unto life and godliness," by calling us to the knowledge of the gospel ; and particularly, certain " great and precious promises, that by these," says he, " you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world thro' lust." † Where you will observe, That *all* things pertaining to " godliness," are given in and by the gospel : That there are in it more particularly, " great and precious promises : " That the end of these promises, is, our being made " partakers of the divine nature " ; by which is doubtless meant, the Spirit of God, with a new heart : That those who are

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* Rom. VIII. 1, 2.

† 2 Pet. I. 3, 4.

made partakers of this divine nature, are not unconvinced, hardened sinners, going on without check or restraint in their evil courses; but such as are in some degree reformed; or such as "have escaped the [gross] corruptions that are in the world thro' lust:" By whom we may fairly understand, such as strive to enter in at the strait gate. And lastly, That this divine nature, or new heart, is given in the way of promise, or in fulfilment of the promises.—So that this exactly coincides with what our Lord lays in the passages considered above, respecting those that hunger and thirst after righteousness; that ask, &c. Nor is it unlikely, that the apostle Peter had these, and such-like promises of our Saviour, particularly in his mind, when he speaks of the great and precious promises given to us, *that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature.*

(13.) IT is very generally allowed (though denied by some men of a disordered mind, hardly fit to be reasoned with,) that all those in general, who hear the gospel, are invited and required, not only to believe it, but to repent of their sins, and to become the *true disciples* of Jesus Christ. It is moreover universally acknowledged, that the gospel promises eternal life to all who do thus, or to all *real christians*: And it is represented as a wonderful manifestation of the goodness of God

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to men, that he should, in this way, promise salvation to them. Now, if these conceptions and representations are just, as they unquestionably are; it may from hence be clearly inferred, that there is grace accompanying the dispensation of the gospel, sufficient to render it effectual to the salvation of those who hear it, provided they are really desirous of, and endeavour after it: Or, in other words, that God will certainly afford to such persons, all needful influences of his Spirit to this end; and consequently, for their renovation and sanctification: For unless there is such grace attending this dispensation, or actually attainable by all in general who hear the gospel, and desire the salvation therein revealed, where is the goodness of God to them in this dispensation? What becomes of these "good tidings of great joy to all people?" or how can this revelation, with any propriety, be called good tidings to all? Is there any real kindness, mercy or goodness, in offering salvation to guilty creatures, and inviting them to accept it, on such terms as are to them impracticable, tho' they desire it, and strive to this end?—impracticable, I mean, with all the helps and advantages that God affords, or will afford to them, tho' they seek them in the best manner their circumstances will admit of? I must confess, I cannot see any goodness herein. There seems to be no real difference between, not offering them sal-

vation to all, and offering it on such terms as these ; unless it be in this respect, viz. That, upon the former supposition, sinners would have no just cause for complaint : They could only say, that God had dealt in a way of strict justice with them ; not shewing, nor even seeming to shew, any mercy to them. Whereas, on the latter supposition, that the terms proposed are really impracticable, by any who desire, and endeavour to obtain salvation, they would seem to have some ground to complain, that they were insulted in their misery, under the fallacious pretext of " rich goodness, forbearance and long-suffering". — God might, indeed, have justly left guilty mankind to perish in their sins, without providing a Redeemer for them, or proposing any terms of reconciliation with them. But if he is pleased as it were to enter into a treaty with them ; to make overtures of peace to them ; and sends ambassadors to beseech them in his name to be reconciled to him ; not only goodness, but even natural justice, seems *then* to require, that the terms proposed should be such, as creatures in their situation, all things considered, may comply with, and so receive the benefit offered, provided they really desire it. For otherwise, as was intimated before, such proposals seem a real insult on the miserable, under the pretext of wonderful goodness and grace. We may from hence therefore clearly infer, that God will

will give his holy Spirit to those who, sensible of their need thereof, have recourse to him ; and really strive to obtain life ;— unless you will suppose, that we may see the kingdom of God, or finally enter in at the strait gate, without being born of the Spirit.

(14.) IT is very generally allowed, that those who, having had the gospel preached to them, do not actually comply with the method of salvation revealed therein, and so finally obtain eternal life, will have an aggravated condemnation at the last day. This is agreeable to the representations of scripture in many places. But what reason ? what justice, would there be in this, if these sinful and unhappy men were never really put into a capacity for obtaining this salvation ? or never had it made possible to them, tho' they desired and endeavoured to become partakers of it ? Are men, even tho' guilty, and deserving of wrath, to be first mocked with the offers of salvation by Jesus Christ, upon terms really impracticable to them, tho' they desire to comply with them ; and afterwards to receive a condemnation peculiarly aggravated, on account of their non-compliance with these offers !— “ Far be it from God that he should do wickedly ; and from the Almighty, that he should pervert judgment ” ! Are not his ways equal !— But this were contrary to our clearest ideas of equity,

equity, of just and fair dealing : It were not only void of all goodness ; but so cruel and tyrannical, that it would be highly blasphemous to attribute such a conduct to God ; who is not only infinitely removed from all unrighteousness, but “ good unto all, and his tender mercies over all his works. ” And yet such a conduct must be ascribed to him, unless we suppose, that the salvation revealed is actually attainable, (and consequently the gift of the holy Spirit) by all those who desire, and use their endeavours to this end — I speak upon the supposition mentioned above, in which christians are very generally agreed ; viz. that all those who do not actually comply with this method of salvation, so as at last to obtain eternal life, are, for such non-compliance, to receive a very aggravated condemnation. And those who pretend to reconcile such a method of conduct with justice, seem properly to fall under the censure of “ speaking wickedly for God. ”

I HUMBLY conceive, that there is not one of the above arguments, but what is strictly conclusive, even when taken separately. However, as was intimated before, the absolute decision of this question is not rested upon any one of them, exclusively of the rest ; but upon the joint force and result of all. And being thus considered, there appears to me, not only

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satisfactory and conclusive evidence in favour of the doctrine proposed to be proved ; but a full blaze of it, so as to take away even the possibility of doubt, from any person of a tolerable comprehension of mind, who seriously attends to it ; — unless he is under the influence of some very unhappy, tho' I do not say, criminal prejudices. — But you are to judge for your selves.

If it should be said, that some difficulty arises from the latter part of the same verse, of which my text is a part ; — “ For many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able ” ; a clear and full solution of this, is contained in the verses following. From whence it is manifest, that our Lord does not mean, that they “ shall not be able ”, tho' they strive during the time of their visitation ; but after it is elapsed. For he proceeds thus : “ When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us ; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are : Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, ” &c. Here you see, when it is that many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able ; viz. when the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door : Which, by the way, is so

so far from implying, that they shall not be able to enter in, tho' they strive during the day of their visitation, that it implies the direct contrary, *viz.* that the door is not then *shut*, but *open* ; and that they are *able*, all things being considered, to enter in thereat, if they really strive to this end. So that these words are plainly parallel with those in Proverbs — "Because I have called, and ye refused ;—I also will laugh at your calamity — when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. THEN shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." In which words it is also clearly implied, that if sinners strive, call on God, and seek him diligently, before that time cometh, he will surely answer, and be found of them.

If it should be farther said, that an unregenerate man cannot be supposed to strive, seek, or do any thing else, in a truly holy manner, so as to be pleasing to God ; and consequently, that God cannot be supposed to have connected the attaining of eternal life with their endeavours: It is answered, That what God has connected eternal life with, can be known only from his own word. To *that* we have been appealing ; and have found, that he has therein actually connected salvation with the endeavours

vours of sinners. And there is some real difference between the temper and actions of awakened sinners ;—awakened by God's own word and spirit; hungry and thirsting after righteousness, and striving to enter in at the strait gate ; and the temper and actions of those, who are proceeding headlong in their criminal courses. Tho' the actions of the former are no ways meritorious, yet they are certainly, to say the least, not so displeasing to God, as those of the latter. Yea; since God has commanded the unregenerate, while and as such, to strive, seek, &c. it must be supposed, that he requires them to strive in the exercise of such faculties as they have, not of such as they have not. Their striving in the exercise of these powers, may therefore properly be called obedience to him, or said to partake of the nature thereof. And if there be in it *any thing* of the nature of obedience, it has also *something* of the nature of good ; and so cannot be *wholly* displeasing to God. It must therefore render those who perform it, more suitable objects of his favour and mercy than those are, who do not strive ; but commit iniquity with greediness. And if such sinners are in the least degree more suitable objects of mercy, than the thoughtless and hardened, this affords an intelligible reason why God, willing to shew his mercy, should connect eternal life with the *striving* of the former ; at least in preference to the *crimes* of the latter :—Tho' it is by no means under the notion of any

real merit, or good desert in those who strive, that God has promised his holy Spirit, and therewith, eternal life to them. Besides: In the way of objecting above-mentioned, it might be thought irrational to suppose, that God had connected eternal salvation with any thing in, or done by, the regenerate themselves. For is there not imperfection and sin attending even them, and whatever they do? And yet it is acknowledged, that God has connected eternal life with their faith, love, &c. tho' it is for Christ's sake, that these promises are made to them; not on account of any merit in themselves. To sum up all in a word: Those who object in this manner, seem to forget, that in the gospel God is professedly treating with us *as* degenerate, sinful creatures, who can do nothing that is perfectly holy, and who deserve wrath;—that he is treating with us about our eternal happiness, upon quite another footing than that of law or justice, for the manifestation of his goodness and grace;—upon the footing of a new covenant established in a Mediator, who died for all, the just for the unjust; in whom all the promises of God to sinners are made, and in whom they are all “yea and amen.” Had these things been duly considered, surely we should not have had this objection so much insisted on as it has been, That no actions of the unregenerate are truly good and holy; and therefore, that no promises of good can be supposed annexed to their endeavours; to any thing that they

can do. Which objection is intirely grounded on a false hypothesis; a feeble support, which being taken away, the objection falls of course; and appears, as it really is, weak and unsolid, tho' insisted on by some worthy men.

If it should be farther objected, that this doctrine of a certain connexion between striving, and obtaining salvation, has a tendency to give ease to the minds of sinners; and to make them rest satisfied with something short of regeneration, under a notion that they are already in a safe estate, in respect of their endeavours; and so may be a means of destroying, instead of saving their souls: It is answered, That if it ministers hope to awakened sinners, and no more than the gospel affords; so much the better: and, that it really affords them no more, has been fully shown. Our merciful Redeemer designed that such persons should have comfort and hope; he gives it to them himself; in which respect they have a right to it: And what the Lord *giveth*, his servants should not *take away*.—As to the tendency of this doctrine to lull sinners into a state of security, or to make them cease striving; this is quite remote from good sense. What! does telling them, that they must strive with perseverance; that this is absolutely necessary; and that if they continue to strive, it shall not be in vain; does this tend to make them remiss, and think themselves safe without striving! How absurd

furd is this! But this objection may be retorted
 with unanswerable force, against the contrary doc-
 trine. For if sinners are told, that there is no
 sort of connexion between any of their endea-
 vours, and obtaining eternal life; but that they
 may perish after all; this has a direct and mani-
 fest tendency to dishearten them; and make them
 give over those endeavours, which, they suppose,
 may be thus fruitless. For hope is one of the
 most powerful springs of action; and endeavours
 are incompatible with despair.—In short: the
 doctrine of this discourse, which affords so much
 consolation to heavy-laden sinners, is no other
 than the good tidings of great joy, which were to
 be unto all people; the very doctrine of Him
 who said—“The Spirit of the Lord God is up-
 “on me, because the Lord hath anointed me to
 “preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath
 “sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to pro-
 “claim liberty to the captives, and the opening
 “of the prison to them that are bound: To pro-
 “claim the acceptable year of the Lord—to
 “comfort all that mourn: To appoint unto them
 “that mourn in Zion; to give unto them beauty
 “for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the gar-
 “ment of praise for the spirit of heaviness: that
 “they might be called trees of righteousness,
 “the planting of the Lord, that he might be
 “glorified.”*

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* Isai. LXI. 1, 2, 3.

THIS subject suggests numerous, and very important reflexions; but there is time only for the few which follow.

1st. WE see from hence the wonderful goodness and mercy of God; inasmuch as he has given us the strongest assurances of pardon and eternal life, on such terms as, by his offered grace, we may all comply with, if we really desire to do it: Which ought to be acknowledged with the warmest gratitude, to the glory of his name. And how justly is the revelation which discovers this grace, and unfolds the mysteries of it; which dispels our anxious fears, and raises guilty worms to the hopes of glory, honor and immortality: How justly is this called, "good tidings of great joy!"—What manner of love hath the Father bestowed upon us!

2dly. IT appears, that tho' the salvation of those that are saved, is intirely of grace; yet the destruction of all who perish under the dispensation of the gospel, will be entirely of themselves; as being owing, not so properly to this, that they were sinful creatures, (for that is common to them with those that are saved) as to their neglect and contempt of that method of salvation from sin, which was revealed to them. Nor will one of these miserable men be able to plead in the judgment of the great day—"Lord, I carefully attended to thy gospel, and heartily strove, according

according to thy command, to enter in at the strait gate: Do not therefore, I beseech thee by the bowels of thy mercy, now shut it against me!—Lord, Lord, open unto me; for I believed thy words; and earnestly endeavoured to walk in that path of life, which was marked out by thee.” —Many, we know, will be able to plead, “We have eaten and drunk in thy presence; and thou hast taught in our streets.” But this is a very different thing; a plea of no real force, as the other would evidently be. And if none will be able to make the former, as they certainly will not; what can they say against the righteousness of such a sentence as this?—“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

3dly. LET all therefore be exhorted to strive, now they are “able” to enter in at the strait gate; lest they should thus seek to enter in hereafter, and “not be able.” Is it not worth while, my brethren, to strive, that you may escape the wrath to come? that you may receive a crown of righteousness and glory from the Lord’s hand; and be admitted to “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God?” Is it not, that you may be admitted to sit with Christ on his throne, “even as he also overcame, and is set down with his Father on his throne!” What great pains do you take to avoid some inconsiderable evil, and

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to obtain some inconsiderable good, even when the success of your endeavours is uncertain? And will you not endeavour to avoid so great an evil as "everlasting destruction?" and to obtain so inestimable a prize as is now set before you;—"the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus?"—especially when you are assured by the word and promise of God, that he will render your endeavours effectual to these important ends? Will you not strive, when He invites? when He commands, who hath both "the key of David," of the kingdom of heaven; and the "keys of hell and of death!"—who openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth! Do not, I beseech you, delay: For human life is precarious; and altho' your own should be prolonged, yet if you go on to provoke God by your sins, he may perhaps give you over to a reprobate mind; so that you will only live to fill up the measure of your sins. "To day then, if you will hear his voice!"——

4thly. LET me exhort all those, who may imagine that they strive to enter in at the strait gate; and so, that they are in the way that leadeth unto life, to examine themselves seriously as to this point. There are many persons who think of this matter, and do something with a view to their future happiness; who cannot yet be said to strive in the sense of our Saviour. Have you ever been awakened to a sense of your
sins?

sins? Are your desires to obtain the "great salvation," strong in some proportion to its importance? stronger than, to obtain any worldly good? Do you diligently inquire after the way of life, which God has revealed? Do you make it your practice to pray to him? Do you endeavour to mortify your lusts? Do you strive to keep his known commandments; still acknowledging that you are unprofitable servants; and saying with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner?" If you do not strive, after some such manner as this, you cannot be thought to strive in the way which Christ commands: And you know the consequence.—But if you do thus, I may safely tell you at least, that you are not far from the kingdom of God; that you are in the way of his blessing; and that "in due time you shall reap, if you faint not."

5thly. It appears, I think, that the main point which I have endeavoured to establish in this discourse, is not only a certain truth, but a very important one. It is so, particularly in two respects. It is a clear and full vindication, both of the justice and goodness of God, in his dealings with men: As it shews, that he has actually put those who live under the gospel, into a capacity of obtaining salvation, if they desire it; and consequently, that those who perish, will be, in a strictly proper sense, their own destroyers. Whereas, if this doctrine is denied, it will not be so

so easy to make these things appear. Such a denial will bear hard on the veracity and sincerity of God in his word, wherein he declareth his great love and compassion to sinful men: And it will be impossible on this supposition, (that we may strive, and yet not obtain) to shew the justice of punishing all such as fall short of this salvation, in a signal, exemplary manner, as despisers of God's grace. But all this will be clear and manifest, if eternal life is really connected with striving — This is an important doctrine in another respect: Sinners ought to have all the encouragement to strive, which can be given them according to the word of God. We know, alas ! how backward men generally are to take pains in religion ; how difficultly they are perswaded to forsake their wicked practices ; and to *labour* here, that they may finally enter into *rest*. All possible encouragement, therefore, ought to be given them, in order to overcome this reluctance. And it is plain, that there is far greater encouragement, on the supposition that there is a certain connexion between their striving and obtaining, than on the contrary, that all their endeavours, however diligent, uninterrupted, and of long continuance, may perhaps be in vain. Be the salvation of their souls of ever so much importance ; yet if they suppose that this may be the case, it must needs prove a great discouragement to them. Such doubt, or uncertainty,

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has a direct tendency to dishearten them ; to damp their endeavours : Tho' it is allowed, that we ought in reason to strive, even upon the supposition of such uncertainty.

WE see then, my brethren, how much those who deny, there is any sort of connexion between the most earnest endeavours of sinners, and their obtaining eternal life, dishonor God, by denying his grace in one material point ; we see how their doctrine tends to discourage those, who are really " seeking the way to Zion ; " how, to " break the bruised reed, and quench the smoking flax " ; and, in fine, how it tends rather to excuse those who fall short of salvation, than to justify the ways of God to men. All this is manifest : Tho', by the way, I am far from charging any ill intention on those who deny such a connexion as has been spoken of. But their doctrine is certainly bad, however good their designs be ; of which God is the only proper judge — But some there are, who go much further : They not only deny any certain connexion ; but assert that a person, going on in his sins without remorse, is altogether as *likely* to obtain salvation at last, as one who is convinced of his sinful state, and uses his utmost endeavours to obtain eternal life ! Yea, there are, who go beyond this ; asserting that all an unregenerate man does, or can do, is so far from having any real tendency to promote his salvation,

tion, that it is but rebellion against God, and so sets him at a still greater distance from Him ! To such lengths as these, some men have gone, in pursuance of certain false principles which they have unhappily imbibed, as principles of christianity : Yea, and have represented the belief of these impious notions, as essential articles of faith ; as if those who denied them, were both strangers and enemies to the grace of God ! Now, if only the denial of any certain connexion between the endeavours of sinners, and their obtaining eternal life, is in some measure to dishonor God ; to throw needless discouragements in the way of those who strive to obtain salvation, and to prevent others from striving ; what shall we say of this other doctrine, which supposes all the endeavours of the unregenerate, rather to aggravate their guilt, and so, their damnation, than to promote their future well-being ! What is the result of such doctrine as this, but that sinners should keep themselves as secure and unconcerned as possible, instead of striving to enter in at the strait gate ? the former being, of the two, more likely to issue in their salvation, than the latter. Whatever apology may be made for those, who only deny a connexion ; it is extremely difficult to make any tolerable one, for these other persons mentioned, unless it be this, that they are beside themselves, and know not what they say. For these notions are so opposite to reason, and the

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whole tenor of scripture ; they tend so directly to make, or to keep men, wicked ; that if any one, in his senses, *could* be supposed to advance them, we could hardly put any other construction upon his doing so, than that he designed to represent the ever good and glorious God in the most odious light possible ; to bring a reproach upon the christian religion ; to discourage sinners from endeavouring to obtain the salvation revealed therein ; and even to fill the world with all manner of impiety and vice. Which God forbid any man should really design ! And rather than believe, any are so abandoned, we ought charitably to hope that those who teach such doctrines, are *only out of their wits*—

“ How beautiful upon the mountains are the
 “ feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that
 “ publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings
 “ of good, that publisheth salvation ” ! — But
 what if one of those, who should be the bearers of
 these tidings, should bring only such as these ?
 — “ Men and brethren ! You are all in a state
 “ of sin and death ; justly liable to the damna-
 “ tion of hell. But God, who is rich in mer-
 “ cy, hath provided a way of salvation for
 “ sinners : He hath sent his Son into the world,
 “ not to condemn the world, but that the
 “ world thro’ him might be saved. O un-
 “ speakable goodness ! Grace ! Grace ! Glory
 “ to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-
 “ will

“ will towards men ;—sinful, guilty, miserable
“ men ! —However, do not mistake me, my
“ friends, as if I supposed you were all, or in-
“ deed any of you, really put into a capacity
“ for obtaining salvation by Christ, altho’ you
“ should desire it, and use your utmost endea-
“ vours to that end. No ! in order to your
“ escaping eternal damnation, and entering in-
“ to the kingdom of heaven, it is necessary
“ that you should become true christians, or
“ new creatures. But this is as much out of
“ your power, as to create new worlds, or
“ to annihilate the old : Neither may you
“ depend on the grace of God to renew and
“ sanctify you, tho’ you should cry day and
“ night unto him, and strive to put yourselves
“ in the way of his blessing. All this may
“ prove in vain. Yea, those persons who are
“ going on in their sins without any remorse,
“ are at least as likely (if not more so) to be-
“ come subjects of the special, saving grace of
“ God, as you will be with all your strivings,
“ while in an unregenerate state. You need
“ spiritual wisdom ; and are indeed directed to
“ pray for it : but unless this wisdom is first
“ given to you, you cannot pray for it so as
“ to obtain it. You need a new heart ; but
“ you must first have such an heart, before
“ you can “ inquire ” of God aright, to be-
“ stow it on you. You need the pardon of
“ sin, for which you are also to pray ; but un-
“ less you are first in a regenerate, and there-
“ fore

"fore in a pardoned state, God may not hear
 "your prayers, and pardon your sins. You
 "need a principle of spiritual life; for which
 "you are to apply yourselves to God in Christ:
 "but then you are to remember, that you are
 "to carry this same principle with you, in going
 "to God for it; or to pray in the actual exercise
 "of it, when you pray for it: Otherwise you
 "cannot expect that God will give it to you
 "—You see plainly then, that all your prayers
 "and endeavours, while unregenerate, may
 "be to no purpose.—Yea, farther: To deal
 "plainly and sincerely with you, I must
 "tell you, that all such prayers and strivings,
 "instead of having the least tendency to pro-
 "mote your salvation, are but rebellion against
 "God; and so may, not improbably, be a
 "means of increasing your damnation.—Such
 "duties are more to be feared than your
 "*other sins*—It is, however, possible that
 "God may save some of you, by a sovereign,
 "irresistable act of his grace, instantaneously
 "changing your hearts; whether you do, or
 "do not seek him.—These are the good ti-
 "dings of great joy, which I bring you in
 "the name of my divine MASTER. And
 "now, O what marvellous love is manifested
 "to a guilty world, in the redemption there-
 "of by Jesus Christ! How rich, how abun-
 "dant is this goodness! Take heed therefore,
 "that you do not receive the grace of God
 "in vain. For as to those of you, (perhaps
 "the

“ the far greater number) who shall not finally be made partakers of this great salvation ; how justly will you be thought worthy of an aggravated condemnation, as despisers of it ? even tho’ you have desired it, and endeavoured to obtain it ; *striving to enter in at the strait gate !* ”

Now, would this be *gospel-preaching* ? Would a sermon in this strain, be really “ good tidings of great joy to all people ” ? Are wandering prodigals, perishing in a strange land, to be brought home to their Father’s house ? is the body of Christ to be edified ? are Jews, Mahometans and Pagans, to be taught to conceive highly of the wisdom, goodness and grace of the christian dispensation, by such representations as this ? Are the “ feet ” of those who bring such tidings, really “ shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ” ; or are they “ beautiful on the mountains ” ? Notwithstanding the cry of, “ Grace ! Grace ! ” does not this doctrine favour much more of *Ebal*, the mount of cursing, than of *Gerizzim*, * the mount of blessing ?—but more especially, than of that “ holy mount, ” to which HE, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, used to resort with his disciples ; and where such truly “ gracious words ”

as

* Deut. Chap. XXVII. 12, 13. “ These shall stand upon mount Gerizzim to bless the people—and *these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse* ” —

as these, used to proceed out of his sacred mouth?—"Blessed are they which do hunger
 "and thirst after righteousness; for they shall
 "be filled—Ask, and ye shall receive; seek,
 "and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be o-
 "pened unto you: For EVERY ONE that
 "asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, find-
 "eth; and to him that knocketh, IT SHALL
 "BE OPENED."—AMEN!

T H E E N D.

P S A L M XL.

BRADY and TATE's Version.

- 1 **I** Waited meekly for the Lord,
 'till he vouchsaf'd a kind Reply;
 Who did his gracious Ear afford,
 and heard from Heav'n my humble Cry.
- 2 He took me from the dismal Pit,
 when founder'd deep in miry Clay;
 On solid Ground he plac'd my Feet,
 and suffer'd not my Steps to stray.
- 3 The wonders he for me has wrought
 shall fill my Mouth with Songs of Praise;
 And others, to his Worship brought,
 in Hopes of like Deliv'rance raise.
- 9 In full Assemblies I have told
 thy Truth and Righteousness at large:
 Nor did, thou know'st, my Lips withhold
 from ut'ring what thou gav'st in charge:
- 10 Nor kept within my Breast confin'd
 thy faithfulness, and saving Grace;
 But preach'd thy Love, for all design'd,
 that all might That and Truth embrace.
- 11 Then let those Mercies I declar'd
 to others, Lord, extend to me;
 Thy Loving-kindness my Reward,
 thy Truth my safe Protection be.

Page 64, line 4 from the bottom, for countenance, read continuance.

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